

Found Ruins of an Ancient Empire Buried Deep in Guatemalan Jungles



Russell Hastings Millward
Youngest American Explorer

Millward, the Young American Explorer, Returning from El Peten, the "Land of Mystery," Brings Stories of Vast Archaeological Interest and Records of a Hitherto Unknown and Rich Region.

THE recent experience of a young American in the great unknown district of Peten, in Guatemala, has furnished for science one of the most valuable records in years regarding the life of what is perhaps the most ancient race of human beings in existence.

In a trip just completed, in which he spent more than two years in the jungles of a territory whose mystery has for years repelled as well as attracted the adventurous, Russell Hastings Millward, America's youngest explorer, has not only captured the world's mileage record by travelling across more than three thousand miles of unknown country, but has opened up for the merchant and archaeologist a land whose wealth has hitherto only been guessed at.

The popular impression that there is no more work for the twentieth century explorer could find no better refutation than in the exploit of this young man. The district of Peten, lying to the westward of British Honduras, between the Caribbean coast and the Bay of Campeche, has been known since time immemorial to all Central Americans as "The Mystery." There Millward has located lakes and mountains whose existence has hitherto been a matter of rumor only. For the first time a white man has penetrated those fastnesses and seen the ruins of temples and palaces which, now overgrown and buried under the foliage of the jungle, were once the centres of magnificent cities. He has not only outlined the extent of the once flourishing empire of the Maya race, but, of importance to the world of commerce, he has practically opened up a new field whose riches will in a few years be one of the

helped get together men, pack animals and provisions for the plunge into Peten. Within a few weeks seventy-five men and a hundred mules had been collected and everything was in readiness for the start.

With all his knowledge of the natives, which he had acquired in numberless shooting and exploring expeditions in the Central American country during previous years, Millward had hardly reckoned upon the difficulties which faced him in his determination to see this land of mystery. "El Peten" it was called. What a paralyzing effect this unknown country would have upon him he did not realize until he was some weeks on his way into the jungles. As settlement after settlement was left behind, and the train of mules and men moved further and further into the bleak uplands and through the tangle of dense swamps, the problem of averting the ever-threatening mutiny of the men became more pressing.

By the time the party had begun the real work of getting into the jungle Millward had mapped out a daily routine, which was rigidly enforced. Sunrise was the signal for the men to turn out and round up the mules, which were fed and watered. The cooks then made breakfast, which consisted of tortillas—a mixture of ground maize and water—corn and beans and coffee. The instruments, hammocks, tents and cameras were then packed, and Millward, taking three or four of his best men, started off in the lead. These picked men, armed with machetes and hatchets, hacked a path through the thick foliage, which Millward followed at his leisure, taking notes and making observations. This was usually kept up

tives, the party contained a large percentage of Mayas of pure blood. Not only did they hold aloof from their Carib companions, but the consciousness that the white man was leading them up into the very country sacred, according to tradition, to their ancestors, who would avenge the insult of trespass, terrified them. When night came on they were usually in a state of panic, and during the day the slightest accident out of the ordinary served to put them on their guard against some imaginary evil. Millward, talking to them in their language, tried repeatedly to discover the cause of their fears. The nearest he came to it was on one occasion when, ascending a ridge of land one noon, his machete men suddenly stopped and refused to go any further.

THE TERRORSTRICKEN MAYAS.

He had been busy with his instruments, and the first he noticed of impending trouble was when he looked up to see his four machete men huddled together talking in an undertone. He ordered them to go ahead, but they drew closer together, giving every indication of terror. Millward approached and asked them what the trouble was, but they refused to talk. Knowing that, while these Mayas might be coaxed or led almost anywhere, it was a waste of time to try to force them into anything, he calmly sat down and had a smoke. After a little the Indians also sat down and began to smoke, but all the while casting glances about them which seemed to indicate that they expected momentarily to be annihilated.

Finally, after using all the eloquence of which he was capable, Millward was able to calm their fears and get them to tell him the secret of their strange actions. Little by little he learned that years and years before—even the men themselves did not know how long—a great Maya hunter had been prowling through that part of the jungle. On the ridge of land before them some jungle beast leaped out upon him and killed him. According to the machete men, therefore, this hunter's fierce spirit was still roaming that hillside, raging in its agony and jealous of any mortal presence. Should a man attempt to go up that hillside and cross that ridge some horrible doom which only a spirit could invent would befall him. The men ended by flatly refusing to venture upon the highland, and at last Millward compromised by crossing the ridge alone and sending the Mayas around the hill to meet him on the other side.

But it was during the nights that the effect of the jungle upon the men was most evident. In some respects their superstitions were justified by the unearthly

An Exploring Base Camp in Quintana Roo, Mexico

to penetrate the forbidden country, and almost immediately the first signs of an ancient civilization appeared. A few solitary graves cropped up in the woods. Some were mere mounds, almost obliterated by the tough and luxuriant jungle growth. Others took the form of funeral piles, surmounted by heaps of stones. The Mayas refused to dig into these graves, but an examination which Millward made with the help of his Caribs revealed little but skeletons. Later other graves were found, some of them constructed of heavy slabs of granite. Then came the first of the series of ruined villages, towns and cities, which were scattered over this entire district of Peten, and which without doubt mark the extent of what was, hundreds or may be thousands of years ago, a great empire.

One day Millward and his men, hacking



Carib Children in Bathing



The Jungles of Quintana Roo, Mexico

from the old Spanish city which was long known as the "Rome of Spain." Its unique replica in the New World was so filled with magnificent Indian temples and palaces that the dazzled Spaniards likened it to the Old World city.

When Palenque, in the neighboring department of Chiapas, was discovered by a party of Spanish travellers in 1729 the existence of a Maya empire was unknown. There had never been any mention of its existence in the reports of the Spanish invaders, and there was no tradition even that it had ever been. Palenque is thought to have been abandoned as early as the twelfth century, and to this day it is not known by what name it was called.

If the feat of Millward in his two years of fighting the untrodden jungles and wastes of Peten had yielded nothing more than the knowledge of these old stone cities it would have been of priceless value, according to archaeologists, in making possible a study of Maya history and culture. So far they are almost as much a mystery as they were two hundred years ago. The elaborate carvings and petroglyphs which mark the buried temples and palaces are undecipherable, and what little history of the movements of the Mayas and their ancestors, their life and art, has survived has been only in the form of legends kept alive by obscure Maya tribes.

Mr. Millward's explorations have established the fact that the confines of the Maya empire extended far south of the belt of towns and cities whose ruins dot the northern coast toward the Bay of Campeche. More important still, it is more than probable that the deserted country through which he cut his way, guarded on all sides by almost impenetrable jungles, was the original birthplace and stronghold of the race.

In the course of his explorations Millward came upon more than three hundred groups of ruins, which mark the site of what were once villages and towns of from 1,500 to 15,000 population each. The latter have all the characteristics of great centres of a highly developed life. As in the famous Palenque, many of the ruins in this hitherto undiscovered land which Millward penetrated are notable in their dimensions, decorations and suggestions of the high degree of civilization which created them. But as ever, owing to the superstition of the Mayas in his party, he

was unable to give them more than scant attention. Mayas always refused to disturb any part of the ruins, and if there was any digging to be done Millward was compelled to fall back upon his Caribs. At night around the fires the young explorer sometimes heard the Mayas discussing ruins which they had seen that day and rehearsing various legends, and although from their talk he was often convinced that these strange men had heard, through the stories of their people, of the existence of these ancient cities, they could never be persuaded to talk to him about them.

RICHES ON EVERY SIDE.

For four months Millward and his men toiled through forests whose richness he declares is not even suspected by people familiar with adjoining countries. Immense mahogany trees of a size and quality unapproached by anything known to commerce grew on every side. Rosewood, ebony, cedar, logwood, chicle, cacao and rubber trees of dimensions unknown to the famous district of Quintana Roo, extended far northward into the districts which he afterward explored. Orchids of the most delicate hue, a half dozen of whose bulbs would make a small fortune for a Fifth Avenue florist, trailed from the trees and dangled the path so as to be a nuisance. Through this bewildering fairyland the tired men and their lagging pack animals finally worked their way, and one night, camped upon an upland plateau, they heard far off to the westward the pounding of the Pacific. Although still more than twenty-five miles from the coast, they could sense, in the still night air, the muffled sound of the sea.

A few days later, four months and a half from the time they left Belize, Millward and his men came out of the jungle at Laguna Carmen, near the Bay of Campeche, in the Gulf of Mexico. There they put in a month of good rest. Several of the men had died from fever and exposure, and a percentage of the mules had been lost. The trip, however, was a marked success. Preparations were at once made for the return trip to Belize, and for this Millward mapped out a route which would take him across about sixty miles further to the north.

DISCOVERY OF "FOUR SISTERS."

It was when a month and a half inland on this second trip that there occurred one of the most important incidents of the enterprise. This was the discovery of four large and hitherto unknown lakes. Here, again, Millward found that their existence, if not their location, was already known to his Mayas under the name of "The Four Sisters."

The party came upon the shores of the first lake one night at sunset. For some inexplicable reason the country for a mile around is almost destitute of trees or thick undergrowth, and broad fields of long, matted grass slope away to the forests, so that the view of the lakes is unobstructed. They have an area of about five square miles and are situated in a group separated by rich, grassy lands with scattering groves of trees. From the talk of his Indians, who were awestricken at the sight, Millward was convinced that these lands teem with Maya legend and that they probably held an important part in the ceremonial life of the empire. These bodies of water are of singular beauty and reflect a peculiar blue, which, according to Millward, is comparable only to that of the Italian lakes.

Maya villages continued to dot the jungles as the party progressed eastward, and in all of them the explorer was well received. As Millward worked further on in the general direction of Belize, his destination, and began to approach the other coast he came upon occasional settlements of Caribs. In physique and strength he considers these men far superior to the Mayas, and in their native customs, uncorrupted by the influence of the coast towns, they are in many ways



An Indian Bed in Peten, Guatemala

chief assets of the Guatemalan government. To see this great unknown jungle with his own eyes, thus doing what no white man had ever done before, the young explorer left New York two years ago. He went straight to Belize, a town on the Caribbean coast of British Honduras, and there, while making arrangements for the expedition, he met Claudio Urrutia, government surveyor for Guatemala, who had made short trips inland, and who

until about 11:30 in the morning, when a halt was called for luncheon. During the afternoon the tramping continued, and a little before sunset work was called off for the day. The men decided upon a good location for the night's camp, and then sat down to wait for the pack train. When it arrived the work of corralling the mules, pitching the tents and getting supper began, and kept all hands at work until after dark.

In contrast to the Caribs, or coast na-

their way forward, came out suddenly into a little glade in the woods. In the centre of which stood a large cylindrical stone. Its sides and upper surface were a solid mass of exquisite carving, in which the figures of birds, flowers and the form of the serpent were repeated in a riot of designs. On the top of the stone a sloping basin was hollowed out, and from this ran a channel to the outer edge. There was no room for doubt that it was one of the ancient sacrificial stones of the Mayas, and that the natural glade in which it had rested for centuries was once the sylvan holy of holies of the Maya priests of the locality, where they "averted evil" to their people by human sacrifices.

It was the finding of this sacrificial stone that introduced the first of the stone villages. Although literally imbedded under the rank undergrowth of the jungle, enough was uncovered to show that at some time it must have been a place of importance. Ruined columns lay about, and great slabs of granite, some of them weighing many tons, were scattered in

irregular heaps. The wavering lines of broken slabs and columns which in places showed through the foliage indicated the general outline of streets. In the decoration and carving of these slabs there was every mark of an art which, although in its form widely at variance with that of the Egyptians, is perhaps as old. There were indications, too, of a culture as ancient.

At the time of the conquest of the Mayas, in a warfare which began about 1540 and continued for years, a city called Tihoo, on whose site the Spanish Merida is now located, is supposed to have been the capital of the empire. The old Spanish chroniclers relate that the palaces and pyramids of the Maya city were so ancient that from the mounds built by the earliest inhabitants there grew trees a thousand years old. In Maya times each of the artificial mounds or pyramids was crowned by a temple. The massive stone blocks employed in the construction of these were used by the Spanish conquistadores in the erection of their own homes. Merida, in fact, got its name